

The Blue and the Gray

N. C. Abbott, principal of the Tekamah (Neb.) public schools, delivered at Tekamah a Memorial day address from which The Commoner is permitted to take these extracts:

What, really, is the significance of this day? What is its purpose? To my mind it serves two purposes—not one. It proves to you veterans that your noble deeds, your heroic self-sacrifice, has never been forgotten, will never be forgotten,

"Till the stars grow old,
And the sun grows cold,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold."

It is a reminder to you that we appreciate this great union which you, by sweat of hand and sweat of heart and sweat of brain, have preserved for us.

The other purpose applies to us of the younger generation alone, and not to you. I can best state it in the words of the immortal Lincoln on the battle-field of Gettysburg: "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us,—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that that nation under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

My friends, let us have no feeling of hatred in our hearts today! In this great and far spreading union, there still should be no room for enmity and ill will. It is true that some loved ones fell—perhaps at Gettysburg, perhaps in the wilderness. But long ago, the myrtle has grown above those dear remains and nature has kindly wiped out the marks of fiery passion and dread carnage—teaching us a lesson that we must not fail to understand. We believe that our southern brethren were mistaken; we believe that they were wrong; we believe that they flew in the face of Providence and of Progress. But we also know that they suffered; we know that they went back to farms grown up to weeds; we know that they were heart-broken and in tears. In the light of all these facts, in the presence of the spirits that here hover over us, can we have any thought, any feeling, save a benediction and heartfelt love?

James Ford Rhodes, an eminent historian is writing a history of the United States, which to my mind is one of the most inspiring books ever published in English. In the introduction, Mr. Rhodes says that he expects to treat of the period from the Missouri compromise up to the election of Grover Cleveland. He declares that the return to power of the democratic party under Mr. Cleveland showed that "the great questions which had their origin in that war had been settled as far as they could be by legislation or executive direction." He continues: "Time only, that old common arbitrator could do the rest." At the time the historian penned those words he could not peer into the future. Had he been able to do so, what visions must have passed before his sight! A people ground down beneath the heel of the haughty Don; a people, aye, even at our very door. Our sympathies aroused by the foul injustice. A battleship in the harbor of Havana. A sharp explosion that goes echoing and reverberating round the globe as the Maine and her intrepid crew are swallowed up in the turgid waves. A vengeance, quick and dread as the lightning flash, and Spain goes back to her home across the water.

The war with Spain was awful! War can never be anything but awful; yet the war with Spain was worth all it cost. And why? Because it brought the north and south closer together than they had ever been since that fatal day when bombs went hissing and screaming and wrapping in dunest smoke of hell the starry flag above Fort Sumter. Because it showed to us of the north that we have one union—a union which we sincerely pray may never again be rent in fratricidal strife, or drenched in fraternal blood. Because the regiments of Massachusetts and the regiments of South Carolina again had a common purpose. Because Joe Wheeler and Fitzhugh Lee and James Longstreet were again in blue uniform, keeping step to the drum beat of the Union.

Do not lament the war with Spain! It was glorious!

The great leaders of our civil war were splendid types of American manhood. Nor must

we think that all the great leaders were on one side. The north had Lincoln, Seward, Grant, Logan, Sherman, Sheridan, McClellan, Scott and a host of others. The south had Robert E. Lee, the two Johnstons, Jefferson Davis, Alexander H. Stephens, Toombs and Yancy. There were giants in those days. Greek was meeting Greek.

It will not, I trust, be considered amiss if I devote a few words to the type of men who opposed each other in that momentous struggle. Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, statesmen! Ulysses Simpson Grant and Robert Edward Lee, soldiers!

Lincoln and Davis—what memories cluster about those names! Practically of the same age—only one year dividing them—a single state, Kentucky, had the honor of being the mother of both. As the one toddled about a log cabin in Hardin county, the other was being carefully and tenderly coddled in a substantial home in Christian county. If you ever take a pilgrimage to the spot where our beloved Lincoln first drew the breath of life, I suggest to you that when you reach the little station for your return, you cast your eye upon the large railroad map hanging on the dingy wall, and look for Christian county. Notice how close to each other the two counties are. Less than two hours will take you from the birth place of one to the birth place of the other. Only three counties—Ohio, Grayson and Muhlenburgh—separate them. What destiny was it that intended one of these babes to be the hero of the federals; the other the hero of the confederates?

Aside from the accident of birth, however, there is more room for contrast than for comparison. While Lincoln was toiling on the farm by day and studying Euclid in the light of fagots by night, Davis was pursuing a classical and military course at Transylvania and West Point. The one was a grocery clerk in a country store; the other, in his own words, "followed under tropical suns and over northern snows the flag of the union." For ten years Davis was a successful planter; while Lincoln was a struggling lawyer and a member of the Illinois legislature. Lincoln emerged from obscurity to serve one brief term in the United States house of representatives; Davis had already been promoted to the United States senate. During the twelve years before the fatal blow at Sumter the former was in retirement; the latter was serving in the United States senate and as secretary of war. On February 22, 1861, Jefferson Davis became president of the confederacy; in less than two weeks afterward, Abraham Lincoln became president of the Union.

The rest of their history is known to you. Why repeat it?

To him who poured out his life blood for the preservation of our union, we pay the tribute of our warmest love. Yet should we not also feel intensest sympathy for him whose mistaken sense of duty caused him to turn his hand against the government established by Washington, Franklin, Madison, Jefferson and Adams; a government which was baptised in the blood of Lexington and Bunker Hill? No one can read the farewell of Jefferson Davis, spoken in the United States senate, without being profoundly moved by it: "It may be pardoned to me, sir, who, in my boyhood was given to the military service, and who have followed under tropical suns and over northern snows the flag of the union, suffering from it as it does not become me to speak it, if I here express the deep sorrow which always overwhelms me when I think of taking a last leave of that object of early affection and proud association, feeling that henceforth it is not to be the banner which, by day and by night, I am ready to follow, to hail with the rising and bless with the setting sun * * *"

The time for misinterpretation of Jefferson Davis is gone. He was wrong; but he thought he was right.

A southern speaker in the United States house of representatives as to whether the names of northern victories should be erased from captured southern flags voiced the sentiment that it would do well for both federal and confederate to adopt in the matter of the great leaders. It was none other than Lucius Q. C. Lamar who then declared: "Southerners do not wish the north to strike the mementos of heroism and victory from either records, or monuments, or battle-flags. They would rather that both sections should gather up the glories won by each section, not envious, but proud of each other, and regard them as common heritage of American valor."

The captains of the contending hosts should

attract our attention—Robert Edward Lee and Ulysses Simpson Grant. A most conservative writer has said of Lee: "In all essential characteristics Lee resembled Washington, and had the great work of his life been crowned with success or had he chosen the other side, the world would have acknowledged that Virginia could in a century produce two men who were the embodiment of public and private virtue."

This eulogy, in my opinion, is not too highly colored. General Lee stands out in bold relief a type of those magnificent men whose purity in public and private life has reached the ideals of philosophers. Of a kingly lineage, he seemed to inherit all the virtues marred by none of the vices of his ancestors. During his whole life he had been a soldier; yet he had been through it all untouched by the vices that regular soldiers are so apt to acquire. We regret that Robert Edward Lee, one of nature's noblemen, did not espouse the cause of the north. Duty seemed to call him elsewhere and he resolutely followed.

The biography of Ulysses S. Grant shows the lights and shadows of American life in greatest contrast. In boyhood quiet and unassuming, no earnest was given of the man destined to become the great captain of the American civil conflict. At West Point he was undistinguished, save for his splendid horsemanship, graduating twenty-first in a class of thirty-nine. He himself has told us, in those delightful reminiscences which will doubtless, two thousand years hence, be studied in the school room as Caesar is studied today—I say Grant has told us how he became interested in novels and romances during his cadet life and wasted his time in reading them instead of studying Tactics. After leaving West Point the young officer remained with the army, serving in the Mexican war with distinction. In 1854, the year in which Lincoln was born again Grant retired from the army. He attempted to go into business; but he only managed to go into debt. The black word "failure" must be written over his sad experience at Galena, Illinois. When war came on, the unsuccessful tanner of Illinois became the most successful general in our civil conflict.

So simple, so direct, so honorable, so forgiving was he that not only the north loved him, but the south soon joined in admiration. When Grant handed back the sword to Lee at Appomattox he touched the hearts of southern chivalry. When he said to the private soldiers, "Take back your horses; you will need them to plow your fields," he wrote his name large and fair and enduring in the souls of the southern people. Only a day or two ago I picked up a metropolitan newspaper and noticed a tribute to Grant by Mrs. Jefferson Davis. I should like to read the whole article but time forbids; a paragraph will show the substance: "I hope there are people, both north and south, who are already looking above and through the smoke of battle to take the just measure of the statesmen and commanders who have left their fame unclouded by atrocities committed upon the helpless who fell into their power, and in this galaxy I think General Grant will take his place unquestioned by his former antagonists."

Nor is Mrs. Davis the only one of southern blood who recognizes the nobility and grandeur of Grant's splendid character. At almost the same time that the wife of the confederate president wrote what I have just read to you, Clark Howell of Georgia poured forth words which show the abiding unity and good will of the once warring and belligerent states: "Those who offered their bullet ridden bodies in the vain effort to stem the conquering tide of his cohorts bore testimony to his genius and his courage. There is not today in the fragmentary ranks of the beaten heroes who once wore the gray a single soldier who would raise his arm to still the cheers those victories won. But above the din of successful arms, beneath the garlands of glorious victory, beyond the glad huzzas of a preserved nation welcoming its martial heroes home, the dirge of those homeless heroes who, after surrender, buried their abandoned hopes with a cause forever lost, bids me turn from this phase of that momentous life to another that is not trumpeted by the raucous blast of war, but which is sounded in the sweet and soothing songs of peace * * *"

"Let us have peace!" A happy and contented people repeat the benediction and cry back to the great heart that now is still in the peace that passeth all understanding, "Thy peace is come!"